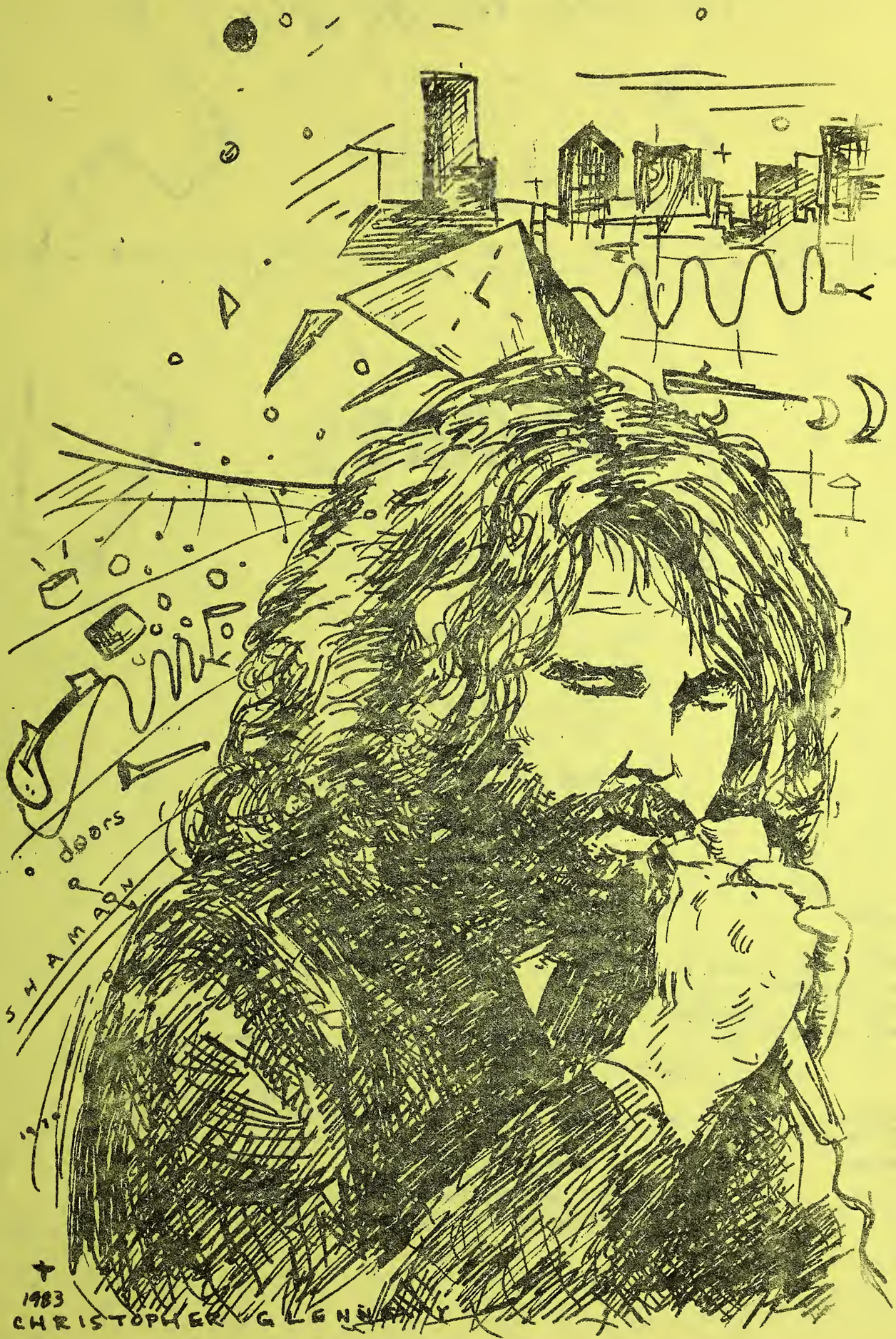
WORD EATER 44



Wordeater 44 Staff

Judy Belfield
Steve Faron
David Moore
Mary Korst
Maureen Mueller
Michael A. Stillman
John Stobart

To get a submission printed in this issue, four of the above had to vote for acceptance. For the award winners, only John Stobart is responsible.

AWARDS

Prose

$25

Len Overcash

Poetry

$12.50 each

Judy Belfield & Dave O'Brien

Covers

$20

Chris Glenney

Manuscripts or cover designs for WORDEATER 45 must be submitted to John Stobart in Room C-1069 by

October 7, 1983

Manuscripts will not be returned, and SHOULD BE TYPED.

NEXT TWO DEADLINES:

October 7, 1983
December 12, 1983

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Dave O'Brien

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH DIRTY SHIRTS?

What do you do with dirty shirts?
Of course shirts smell if you wear them too much
So I wash mine
Sometimes . . . Tee hee

****

Chris Glenney

THE MANNEQUINS

Hey you! Melvin!
How do you like my dress?
What are we going to do
with him?
Where'd that saleslady go to?
My hair's a mess.

Melvin!
Hear them speak
Tall frozen shadowed
Statuettes of plastics
Stiff eyes
Hard lips
Cold Lady of time.
See the madness
grip his mind.
Melvin!

****

Rosemary Grossi

I QUIT

That battered old bitch
matched my image of witch.
Her voice would cackle.
Her nose did twitch.
She looked my way.
My spin did quiver.
Up my back it sent a shiver.
I dropped the pizza,
and destroyed the sign
that said "We Deliver."

****

Judy Belfield

ROOM AND BORED

She talked on and on--
life is boring
there's no more color
my days are all the same.

Finally, she said,
"There are no more thrills."
He snored.

****

Scott Speirs

HOW BEINGS FROM PLUTO EXPERIENCE DEFEAT, THROUGH OMISSION
and/or
A Tribute to the Perseverance of Man

The circling ship above us,
Reveals a secret plan.
And as the craft approaches,
We prepare for it to land.

And as we board the craft,
Seeking our cosmic oasis
We realize we've been mislead
By Plutonian creations.

And as the tripeds devour us
And as they clean their teeth,
We sense we can steal victory
From the mouth of our defeat.

For Plutonians can't eat marrow
(or cartilage or bone)
And as the creatures slowly choke
We laugh aloud. We
head for home.

****

Chris Glenney

Submit for your disapproval:

The images you see on this page are real. Do not try to adjust this sheet of paper. There's a signpost ahead your next stop.....

— The Violent Zone —

****

Scott Speirs

A RADICAL OBSERVATION

OF A CHAOTIC ~~FORM~~ LACK OF GOVERNMENT

A bearded dog.
(Wanting to bite.)
Watches disorder.
(Wanting to fight.)

A Attack the master?
(Longing to bite.)
Drink up his blood.
(Longing for night.)

B Leaving him nowhere.
(Seeker of might.)

C A beardless dog.
(Fearing the night.)

A The questioning of possible measures that would change (in this case, through violent insurrectional activity.)

B Mission accomplished our hero/anti-hero after undermining the existing power structure he so despises . . .

C Now finds himself in similar circumstances.

****

Jack J. Dempsey

MICHAEL MOUSE (OR, THE MORAL IS)

This is the story of Michael Mouse. As it was, Michael was a field mouse. He made his home amongst the broken brick of an old abandoned railway station. Now Michael did all his hunting for food across the railroad tracks in a gigantic open field. This field was good hunting ground, as a great variety of insects and other small creatures mulled around going about their pointless lives.

Things were going well for Michael as his hunting skills were becoming sharper with each passing day. Michael was getting faster and faster, and ate better and better. However, on one particular day, Michael was a step slow on his way back from the hunt.

The train was still passing as Michael crawled over the second track. Being a step slow, he had his tail cut off. Not wanting to leave well enough alone for awhile, Michael turned and went back for his piece of tail. As he peeked back over the rail, the last car passed and cut off his head!

The moral of this story is just this: Mice, as well as men, can lose their heads over a piece of tail.

****

Stacy Biedermann

SUNDAY MORNINGS

No way, after the
Endless headeache I have today I'll never have another beer . . .
Verify that for me. I know I've said it before, but I'm
Ever so serious this time . . .
Really I am.
. . . next weekend
All's well here, and how are you? Ya, we
Got pretty drunk last weekend,
And I could hardly move Sunday morning . . . There's a party
In that new house tonight are you going?
Never fear, I'll be there . . . ready for another beer.

****

Judy Belfield

DRINKIN TO DO

He sauntered in
like a cowboy,
his bowed, lanky legs gliding
up to the bar,
tipped his invisible hat
and sat.

"Wow, it's Gary Cooper,"
said the eyes
of every female in the place,
but he didn't hear,
he didn't care--
he had drinkin to do.

Flutter, flutter,
everywhere eyelashes batted,
averaging better than Hank Aaron.
Giggle, giggle,
sweet bells tinkled,
competing with the juke box.

Long tall Sally,
in a too-red dress,
dragged herself in
from the alley.
Her hair didn't know
which way to go,
but followed, nevertheless,
the china-white face
and huge, limpid eyes--
bedroom-wise and languid.

Smoke cleared,
and the old "thousand guitars"
started playing.
A cliche hush of the crowd,
the cowboy's eyes
met Sally's
and said, "Howdy-do."

But she didn't hear,
she didn't care--
she had drinkin to do.

****

Len Overcash

SUPPER

John Reynolds was washing the chicken parts under the faucet, cleaning them for cooking on the grill, when he heard the gutteral, buzzing noise. Instinctively, thinking a large wasp had gotten into the house and was buzzing him, he ducked and took a fast look around. But the origin of the high-pitched sound moved from the open kitchen window to the open patio door making him realize that it was an outside noise. He dropped the chicken in the sink and hurried to the sliding screen door.

Another tremor rocked his soul, one of those minor earthquakes of his world. Small, single-engine airplanes continually flew overhead, flying too low usually, and John wondered apprehensively if one hadn't stalled its engine and was gliding down, propeller whirling futilely, to crash into a house. Probably his. It was a thought that plagued him often during the long summer. They lived only a mile from the small airport and in direct line with the landing strip. Of all the houses in this city for a plane to crash into, John knew his was the one. It was fore-ordained.

The sky was empty except for the cotton-ball clouds growing overhead. John listened for the sounds of a horrible wreck, but neighborhood noises didn't change either.

His next impulse was to find his eight-year-old son. Scanning the back yard, he saw Keith stalking something near the garden at the far corner of their yard. He watched his son's antics for a few seconds, relieved but puzzled, then returned to the sink and his chicken.

Since he'd been laid off, cooking had become a form of therapy for John,

(continued)

though eating had created a roll around his middle. He felt good when his wife and son enjoyed his food, and it ruined his day when they didn't. And barbequed chicken was his forte. He imagined himself to be a craftsman with chicken, like a glass-blower, giving it the proper amount of attention with the correct heat and tools. The trick to a good piece of chicken, like a good painting or wood carving, was patience and concentration.

In the ten years he had been married to Ginny, John had never touched a pan--not until his employer had closed his doors last fall and moved out of the state. Now, at 36, with a working wife, he was a house-husband. A fairly good one, he thought.

He lit the gas grill, set the level of the flame, and gently placed the pieces of chicken on the metal grill. He was going into the house to get his favorite book when he heard the noise again, and then Keith began yelling in the quiet air and running pell-mell toward the house.

"Dad! Dad!" he screamed shrilly. "They shot me! They shot me with a ray gun!"

John turned around and watched his son arms and legs moving in a blur, come tumbling up the two steps of the wooden deck and slump on the seat of the redwood picnic table.

"Who shot you?"

"Them!" Keith said, pointing generally upward at the sky. John noticed that he looked genuinely afraid.

"Who, son?"

"Them in the space ship!"

Another tremor rumbled through John's soul. The boy was always imagining strange things: werewolves, vampires, or just plain monsters. As if some of the little kids in the neighborhood weren't monsters enough. John suspected they were usually plotting to do Keith harm because of his athletic ability. They were worse than any outwardly scarred Frankenstein; they were scarred in their gnarled little brains.

"What space ship?"

"It's gone now," Keith told him. Keith was short and sturdy, and was doing well in sports, but his imagination bothered John, who added it to his list of things to worry about.

John stared directly at Keith for several long seconds, which sometimes worked. Not this time. Keith didn't look away.

"They shot me." Keith held up his left arm, a thin red welt streaked along an inch of his arm.

"It looks like a scrape to me," John said. "Maybe you brushed against the rose bush or something."

"Nope," Keith said firmly. He began swinging his feet. "They landed in the garden. I saw them and sneaked up, but they spotted me when they came out and pulled their guns. They got me a couple times." He showed two more of the narrow, puffy welts on each bare leg. "But I got one of them!"

John frowned. "Where is it? What did you do with it?"

"I tossed it in the spider's web. The one I been feeding all week. You know, one of those big yellow and black ones that are on tomato vines."

"Well, however you did those, you better go in and wash them off and put some medicine on."

"Aint sore," Keith answered.

John jerked his thumb toward the sliding screen door and Keith got up slowly. Realizing that it was time for the first check on his chicken, he raised the top of the grill and each piece was given close attention.

Where could a kid get ideas like tiny space men landing in the garden--and shooting at him, John wondered. From TV! Where else? He remembered they'd watched an old "Twilight Zone" episode last week in which Agnes Moorehead had taken a broom to small spacemen who turned out to be earthlings on another planet. They had shot her several times too.

John shook his head in worry. Was TV influencing Keith to an extent he'd not imagined? If so, what should he do about it? It was another tremor in his world.

To get his thoughts from Keith, John decided to cut a fresh salad from the garden.

With the white plastic bowl nearly filled with lettuce, radishes, cucumbers, and onions, John moved down the row of tomato vines. The spider, unnervingly large and brilliant against the green vines, was having its own supper; feasting on a victim wrapped in a thick mass of sticky web. John watched it eating, fascinated and nauseated at the sight of the short, sharp fangs driven deep into the mummy-like bundle. Again he wondered at the interests of his only son. How could a boy spend hours feeding a horrible creature that sucked out its victims' insides? Nasty, nasty things! John decided to spray the bug with a good dose of Raid after supper.

Then something hanging on the very last strands of the huge web glinted in the sun and caught his eye. Looking closer, John saw a small, shiny space-gun, just like some that came with the plastic Space Patrol figurines he'd gotten Keith for his birthday. He reached out to pluck it from the web when he felt a stinging pain.

A thin, red welt began puffing along the outside of his index finger.

****

Jerry Frazar

A RIVER FLOWS AND CHANGES SELDOM

An object in motion has a certain amount of inertia. It tends to stay in motion, or so the scientists say. That is, unless the object is acted upon by some other force, some kind of braking power.

A jagged, hellishly hot, broken landscape by day. It burns into your senses. Sears your flesh. At day, your mouth feels as hot, dry, and dusty as the parched dead land that so nearly swallows you in its awful immensity. At night, it strangles down to a cold, bitter hole. Your breath freezes on your cheeks as it leaves your mouth. Your breath frosts over the bolt action of my rifle and creates a danger that it might jam, so I only peer through it every ten minutes or so.

Morning will come soon. With it, light and heat. Much heat and light. We've been sleeping fitfully under the dark sky. The thin issued blankets don't provide much warmth. To my back, rise an unfriendly army of hills that fade off into a huge spread of rugged hills, ahead of me, roughly bisected by a lonely road winding through the low hills.

Morning will come soon. Our eyes try to cut through the velvety darkness that presses in on us. Our ears are attuned to the sounds of motors, signaling tro transports, tanks, planes, approaching from a distance.

The morning star, Venus, shines bright and clear through the crisp, still and as yet unspoiled morning air. She sits in her throne, burning. . . waiting . . .

A slight murmur is rising. The few amongst us who have stolen a moment or two of sleep are stirring, waking from soft warm dreams of life back home.

These young men, almost boys, come back to the cold barren hills their lives have led them to. Their pubescent awareness of the local politics have fired them all with a deep red anger . . . they all get set to wait, their hands on their guns.

The sky to the east is fading from black to dark, intense blue, to a growing red stain. Metal clicks solidly against metal, as rifles, morters, and grenade launchers are cleaned and checked routinely. I clean and check my own rifle, and load it. A full clip of the best ammo available. All ammo is rationed stingily but today must be special. We all have full clips.

The sun begins to rise as I force down my skimpy breakfast of dried and, dammit, only partially preserved, rations. We're all getting used to it, though, even the younger ones aren't complaining any more.

The peaceful beauty of the sunrise in the mountains is still not lost on us. We aren't hardened against the calm beautiful birth of the new day. Reds and blues shoot majestically across the sky and shine down on the land.

Alertness flowers amongst us, proportionate to the amount of thick, sweet Arabian coffee that's been brewed over the small, smokeless fires. We talk hushedly and puff anxiously on stale cigarettes.

Suddenly, a murmur screams across the sky. Everybody tenses up instantly. A delicate, soft snarl, a growl, floats gently with the breeze. The sound is still very faint, very far away, but it's closing in rapidly.

It's the enemy. Their trucks and tanks. A guy with binoculars points down the road almost to the horizon. An hour away on that road. A quiet, sullen tension begins to build as the column approaches. The sounds grow louder, intertwined, convoluted. Subtle harmonies build up and melt to create a complex picture in the mind of the metal and flesh war machine creeping down the road.

As I wait, all the causes leading up to this day flash through my mind. The broken promises, the broken dreams. Strikes made by one side, swiftly and cruelly countered by the other. Surprise midnight raids on munition dumps, factories, hospitals. Once a school had been bombed, but they had said it was due to a navigational error. They had apologized.

We hated them, for good and legion reasons, and they hated us in return. And we turned our hatred over in our minds, as they must have been doing, and meanwhile, the sound of the trucks grew louder and louder.

Like a thin metal snake, the column winds its way across the valley floor. As it approaches ur positions, we all settle into comfortable firing positions with our guns in place. Prayers are hurriedly cast off, rifles are cocked. The trucks inch towards the center of the cross-hairs in the sight of my rifle, and . . .

Mortars fire, tremendously from just behind us. We start firing. Tires squeal and some of the trucks run into the ditch. I can see little figures running out from the backs of the trucks and heading in all directions, looking for shelter, for a safe place to shoot from. I fire and in answer I hear a sound like that of a cork gun from their direction. Some of the figures lie motionless on the ground. One of the trucks explodes like a Tonka truck hit with a sledgehammer. Some of our men have been hit. I hear groans of pain from nearby. Down below a cross-hair matches up and a light pressure is applied to a trigger. Contact is made and a small amount of powder reacts explosively. A small pointed piece of brass and steel is forced out of a steel tube at a very high velocity.

(continued)

A River Flows and Changes Seldom, continued

It is acted upon by various forces. Gravity, wind. Some speed is lost.

All of the factors affect the projectile. Guide it, as if down a chute, directly towards the center of my forehead. It makes contact. In a gloriously drawn-out instant, the skull is penetrated and shattered. Innumerable blood vessels and cells are reduced to pulp, an unformed mess. Inertia carries it into a long damp streak stretching behind the unstrung body.

****

Jerry Frazar

REFLECTIONS ON MEMOIRS SNUCK BY A DAMP INNER EYELID

Part B. Eyeless and Bible black

moss green, cool and silent light
creeps across the day
sickness upon sickness
didsolves into a dew
(oh too solid fresh)
precious and barely felt

the stuff of this life
usually leaves a sticky, sour film
coating the teeth, gums, and tongue
collects puss-like in the corner of
clear blue peeper
but somewhere in the dense caverns
that have flown like seabirds looking for
a roost
through my mind
I have glimpsed, sought and held
occasionally
a flower of such rare radiance
as to leave the mind self same me eye
blank and slick with joy
and then I awake from the dream
to a dream that for the time being I live
and what I see around me
I can fit into the teacup
and fill the crack
and hold in the palm of my hand
for but an hour

the mending of the life I found wanting
for the lack of water could happen
and the gossamer tense membrane
that keeps me me and in my place
and you you and in yours
might begin to show strain
this is my last hope (before the next one
I hope)

I will formulate a promise
a pact with my art
and perhaps state it (he's seeing shapes
in the shadows again)

Please humor any obsession
I may entertain
just because I entertain properly
show the guest politeness
doesn't mean he's invited to bed

That's the end of the poem I guess

sit sit sit and
think think think
savage

we must have faith
even as the screen dims
and the heart fades to blackness

****

Nancy Lockhart

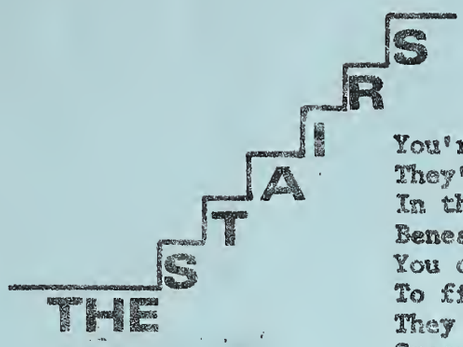
FORWARDING ADDRESS

I said goodbye to tired animals that
stare from papered walls around my bed.
I packed my books in boxes;
took a last look at the half-dead pine
which shades my western window.
There's another house which requires me now,
wide and high, set back far from the road.
Its rooms smell like old libraries.
I shall soften the spaces there
with pots of geraniums, fat restful chairs,
and the glow of fire strapping the hearth.
The bedrooms will welcome my children and
all the things that children bring and save.

My husband's hands will till a garden,
hang a swing
from the high branches of the backyard
sycamore.
I'll make the kitchen harvest-ready;
baptize it with spice scents and chicken soup steam.
A house with its pipes and wires revived,
wood polished mellow,
a lantern ablaze in the window.

****

Dave O'Brien



You're quite aware
They're always there
In the dark
Beneath the stairs
You quicken your ascending pace
To find the light where dreams erase
They reach with gnarled hairy hands
Grasp your ankles like iron bands
Then there's more that hold your legs
You twist and kick, cry and beg
From nowhere they reach your knees
You fight and fight but can't break free
Suddenly--
They're there no more
You race towards freedom's door
But freedom turns to ghastly shock
To find the basement door is locked
Turn and look
As you feared
Step by step they get nearer
With drooling fangs and hungry leers
With useless cries you try to plead
So this is where it's all to lead
To sit
And wait
For them to feed

****

Judy Belfield

ALWAYS THERE WERE HOLIDAYS

The sound of dishes clanking
in the kitchen
echoing away from my ears,
a muffled chorus
of ladies' voices,
aprons tied with haphazard bows
over their smiles,
a chattering joy
akin to fighting birds
splashing in puddles
and scolding the mud--
as though there could be puddles
without mud.
I hear it,
the sound of yellow holidays,
the division of nobility--
leonine and lying languourously--
from the cluck, cluck of duty
which didn't know
it was a lave to itself.

****

Dave O'Brien

COLORS

Gold are the drapes which cover my windows
Grey is the world outside seen within
Red is the soul which harbors my passions
Deep blue the bottom, the endless, the
void

****

Judy Belfield

SIC TRANSIT . . .

A remembered taste of avocado
soft, luscious, warm
a tropic excursion
when first undertaken--
an exquisite walk
on damp, brown earth
through wet, green-leafed bushes
brushing bare arms
with cool drops of water
condensed from the humid air.
A yesterday kitchen
shines exotic
for its treasures
served simply on earthen plates,
and the taste of avocado
has never been the same.

****

Judy Belfield

MARCH HARE

Up and down the street,
racing with and against the wind
brittle paper
crinkly and crisp
attached to thin sticks,
a fragile construction
taken by a gust
into the high branches
of a heartless tree
which will not give up its hostage.
The pulling,
the too-soon tear.
A game begun and ended
in what seems only a moment.

Have you noticed
kites are made of plastic
nowadays?

****

Jerry Frazar

REAL TIME DRAMA

A mad dash
A group rushes madly from the shadows
Growing at the edge of the stage
To coalesce into a scene
A tragedy a comedy
Predestined from the foundation of play
The mad rush melts into
A poised frantic dance (macabre)

The actress notices a child
In the audience waving without a sound
And returns the compliment without
A word.

The actor pauses
Tossles his hair thus
Finds a small thread
And plays the silver cord
Fishing through the audience
Threading through their hearts
Till a singular firm place
Tugs the line taut
The play's the thing
The play begins.

****

Jack Dempsey

I HAVE FREEDOM

Some measure success by what one owns,
I though have seen life in a different light.
I've known concepts wheich most only fantasize,
Mine are songs and stories of the night.
I have freedom . . .

I've lived a life of peace and free love.
I won't live forever, so I'll take it when I can.
Now that's the road that's taken me,
from one lover to yet another,
. . . and the sorrow it brings.

I've aged but a few, yet feel older than my days,
Lookin back, I see ten years of memories I'll save.
Somehow, I'll always regret what freedom's given me,
But time walks on, and I've lingered too long.
Yes, I have freedom,
And all the sorrow it brings

****

Scott Speirs

MAN-MADE MADNESS
(dedicated to my robot)

Metal man--
Sweatless, breathless,
Monstrously lifelike,
Useless nuisance,
Forthwith, worthless.

Metal machine--

Deleted.

****

Dave O'Brien

TWO WITHERED FLOWERS

A cloud blotched out the sun
Sending darkness across the field
Bringing to day
Reeking dead evening,
Two withered flowers were found.

New sprouts will ripen
But grayness still lingers, even in fertile soil.
For two such rare flowers will ne'er be seen again,
The field forevermore altered.

O what madness doth kill in Springtime
As all are splattered with the blood
of its sickness.

****

Chris Glenney

HINDENBURG

Hindenburg big and bad on Jersey's shore
Routine showoff for new Newsreels
Slower, slower, hesitation, anticipation,
mouth-opening roar
An instant, a flame, a bomb, a great nation kneels
For momentus occasion turned nightmare whore.

****

Dave O'Brien

ANOTHER LINE OF CARS

A line of cars passed by,
A somber procession down the slow road,
And I wondered to myself
Could sixty burning headlights
Light the way
On such a path unknown?

****

Judy Belfield

REFRAIN

On a soft night
the song echoes eastward
and caresses the cheek
of a long-lost son,

the same lullabye
the red man heard
when the fires died--
he knew the melody
his fathers sang
to the Moon of Black Butterflies,

and on a soft night
the song echoes . . .

****

Nancy Lockhart

WHO SHALL REMAIN NAMELESS

Weeds among the numbers
mark the grave.
The digger now and then
comes clearin' sod,
then stops to tip his hat to God.
Offers up a prayer, that when
himself lies there,
a child, a friend will think
to set a stone.
The digger then goes on alone,
knowing the world's as cold as
any grave.

****

Carol Kegarice

THEY NEVER LEAVE HOME

Deep within the Louisiana swamp the word "time" has lost its meaning. It's as if a giant hand pulled the curtain on the play of progress, forcing the actors to remain in one scene.

Spanish moss hangs from the gnarled trees like the beards of grizzled old men. Bent and weathered sentinels, they are fated to forever keep watch, protecting the swamp and its inhabitants from intruders.

The human dwellers of this isolated place have, through years of in-breeding, become a species all unto themselves, as specialized as the alligator.

It was to this swamp and its people Lana LaClare belonged.

Deep within her soul, Lana knew her new life was only temporary. Yet, like many before, she relentlessly pursued her goals, believing she was somehow different. Lana had come to New Orleans for a better way than a two-room shack supported by stilts.

Lana, although an artist and a dreamer, had a very practical side. She knew her talent was limited. She entertained no ideas of becoming world-famous, or even famous in the city, as many of her contemporaries did. Lana rented a very cheap room and carefully put away her money. She hoped in a few years to have enough to attend nursing school. Lana pictured her small dainty frame clad in a white uniform. It would compliment her dark hair and eyes nicely. After completing school, it would only be a matter of time until Lana met the doctor of her dreams.

At first, Lana was content to sell her paintings in St. Peter's Square. In the steambath of summer, Lana set her easel beneath a tall magnolia, smiling sweetly at the tourists, old ladies, their cellulose legs flopping along beneath Bermuda shorts, perspiring conventioneers, wearing the standard gray, northern business suits.

As the days passed, a resentment began to grow inside Lana. Why should these people have so much? Why should they travel, sleep in the Holiday Inn, when she, Lana LaClare, had only a one-room apartment? Why must she share a bath and kitchenette with five other people? Why did it take so long to fulfill her dream? The little room she had seen as a new beginning now appeared shabby and cheap, each crack in the plaster became a mocking finger.

Lana knew there was a way. She'd been told it often enough in the leering eyes of the businessmen and sometimes in outright propositions.

So the seed planted by these propositions, watered by Lana's resentments and desires, began to grow.

Lana's initial shock was at the ease of it. Most of the men only wanted straight sex. It was over so quickly, a few seconds of heavy breathing and Lana LaClare was fifty dollars nearer her goal.

Sometimes there were different cases. These men, Lana handled in a special way. She drew from the steamy secrets the swamp had given her, ancient secrets of whispering promises as the wind whispers through Spanish moss, secrets of gentle massages, slow as a water moccasin gliding through slimy green swamp water.

Lana's painting was now only a way to meet prospective customers for her more lucrative business.

Clouds, dark and ominous, were gathering over the gulf as Lana set up her easel. This would be her last day of painting.

At the same instant Lana LaClare hung her first painting, Robert Gordon was loping slowly down Bourbon Street. Robert had realized in a matter of moments he didn't like Bourbon Street. The smell of rotting garbage, stale beer, and human urine, combined in a permeating odor that hung like a nauseating cloud in the close, humid air. The sound of Dixieland battered his brain cells like dice in a shaker. Periodically, through open doors, he caught glimpses of nude dancers beckoning the crowds to enter. Most horrifying of all were the people. Herded along, shoulder to shoulder, they pushed, laughed, and called out. Robert hated people. He feared them in large numbers with an intensity so deep it made him want to leash out, to shove them aside and run.

The only thing Robert feared more than crowds was loneliness. Sometimes, the awful gnaving loneliness drew Robert into situations he abhorred. This loneliness had reached new peaks since his mother's death three months before.

Robert realized, at forty-five, time was critical. He had to find a companion, loving and gentle as his mother, but able to fulfill the sexual fantasies that were becoming such a large part of his existence.

Relieved, Robert reached the end of Bourbon Street, he turned and headed toward the tall steeple of St. Peter's.

When she saw him, he was looking over her paintings carefully, as if genuinely interested. Lana gave him her widest, guaranteed-to-please, tourist smile.

"I really like your work." His eyes

(continued)

were soft. They reminded Lana of a deer she'd once seen a picture of.

"Thank you. I mostly paint childhood scenes."

"You're from the swamp." This seemed to excite him.

"That's right. Lived there all my life."

"Hey," he continued on in an excited voice, "I dreamed when I came here of meeting a real Cajun girl. Do you think you could go to dinner with me? I'm only here two days and it would mean so much to me to have dinner with a beautiful lady."

"Typical," thought Lana, "thinks I know some voodoo to cure his fortyish impotence. Well, maybe I do."

"That sounds okay," she said aloud. "I think it will storm anyway, so why don't we make it an early evening?"

A delighted Robert Gordon helped Lana gather her art supplies, all the while talking excitedly of his marvelous job as a chemist in Indiana, the amount of money he made, as if he were selling himself and plying Lana with questions about her Cajun upbringing.

The conversation continued along the same lines at dinner. Lana's head began to pound and she wished he'd get to the point.

"Would you like to see some Polaroid snapshots I took this morning? Maybe you could paint from some of them."

"Fine," was Lana's only comment.

Inside the standard Holiday Inn room with its musty motel smell, he began to seem calmer.

Looking over the pictures, his eyes t ok on the soft, deer-like quality.

"Sometimes," she spoke slowly, weighing each word, "I have problems. You know, with women. They want to rush, rush, rush me!"

"It will be fine," Lana's voice was soft and lilting. Her hand touched his leg. She felt truly sorry for this wistful man.

"Have you been with a lot of men?" He frowned in a curious way.

"Not so many."

"I want you to have been with a lot of men!" The corners of his mouth dropped to a sneer, the eyes suddenly hard.

"So that's your game," she thought. Her feelings of compassion evaporated as the morning mist evaporates with the harsh sun.

"I've been with hundreds of men."

"Tell me about it." He was removing his clothes as Lana began to speak. She felt the power begin to seep through her. Lana LaClare took control with her mind, her mouth and her hands.

Rising from the bed, Lana began to dress. She remembered there had been no price agreement and hoped she could handle the situation without embarrassment.

"Where are you going?" Robert's voice came sleepily from the bed.

"I have to leave now."

"But you can't!"

There was a warning note in the desperate tone that gave Lana the impression she shouldn't quibble over price--just chalk it up to experience.

"I have an early day tomorrow," her voice was calm and even.

"No!" He was out of bed. "You can't leave me. You're mine. I met you just as I knew I would, and you have to stay!"

Lana began to back toward the door. Inside her head she saw a snowy egret floating above peaceful waters. One word formed in her mind, "home."

"I want to go home." Lana knew her own words were true. The dreams of the doctor no longer mattered. The reality of the snowy egret had taken their place.

"Bitch! Whore!"

Each word was accompanied by a resounding blow to Lana's face. At first, she tried to fight, for Lana LaClare was a swamp girl, and she fought bravely, but she was small, and no match for insanity. Robert Gordon's hands closed around her throat, and Lana drifted to meet the snowy egret.

Later that night, Robert carried the limp body of Lana LaClare to his rented car. He'd taken the time to chart the drive on the road map. Robert was, after all, a very careful person. It didn't take as long as he expected to reach the swamps. With consideration and kindness, Robert Gordon deposited Lana LaClare's remains in the swamp she'd never really left.

****

Jerry Frazar

HAIKU 14 & 35

Students whirl by
A rush of red hair flushes
A hole sweet, empty

****

Judy Belfield

CITY LOTS

City honks
in the morning,
way way off
in a dream.

Near the plastic windows
of a Lego skyscraper
a fly is climbin--
or maybe it's a spider
scalin the walls,
wantin to mate with fame,
chew up its name
with some kinda relish
(not pickle).

How d'ya make a dent
in this town
with its steel sides
and iron guts--
you with only a flesh foot
and clay fingers . . .

Out in the lots
surrounding Cosmopolis,
kick the dust between the weeds
and hope your feet don't bleed
from beer-bottle remains--
watch a small cloud rise
and fall.

****

Sue Cherven

THE DARKNESS DESCENDS AROUND US

The darkness descends around us,
and casts an eerie haze
upon the road we travel. It's
getting late (it's 11 p.m.) and our
destination's unknown--while our
minds continue to search
for a temporary place to stay

We must endlessly travel, never
stop, for our restless souls
grow uneasy; the feel of ground
beneath our feet soothes the nerves
and gives us peace.

The path rises up to meet us,
there's no end in sight. Somehow . . .
Somewhere . . . I can feel it in my bones--
that our journey's end will soon
enough appear, and we will be
loathe to give way to the end, so
used to travel are we. So
let the darkness descend
and cast its haze--the road
remains our home.

****

Yolanda Wolz

SURE ENOUGH

Sure enough
I'm a space buff
not a human race buff,
wouldn't ya know
to Sirius I'd go
to find love of a kind
that really blows your mind.

How could ya take
the inferior human make
of an earthly guy
Sirians don't make you cry.

Sure enough,
I'm a space buff
not a human race buff.

Who needs fast cars
when I can see the stars
and Andromedus
was made for us.

Space princess, my role
honeymoon in a black hole
happy for eternity
or to the end of the galaxy.

****

Rosemary Grossi

ENLIGHTENMENT

More microscopic particles of dust
in the eyes of the universe.
Like the dust we trample beneath our
feet,
indiscriminately, without thought,
Yet we shout to destiny--
Recognize ME
I'M important!
For all our efforts,
Art and science,
We simply wait for death.

****

Rosemary Grossi

R.E.M.

There is a sleeptime place we all can go
to visit any time of day or night
a place where little lost memories flow
avoiding sensing guilt of wrong, or right
bringing the unattainable into sight
let go, no one else will know, so
watch out! the other side of you will show
hold tight as adventurous wings take flight

There are no nighttime rules or infractions
nor need of spent archaic traditions
no fear of lust subduing attractions
let go of all pent-up inhibitions

No one needs a prearranged plot or scheme
to live out their fantasy in a dream.

****

Dave O'Brien

SCREAM

Scream
What sees the keeper of Time
Life in the gray matter pages
Of the modern philosopher
Bleeding from reasonable rationalism
Scream
What sees the keeper of Time
Death in the political arena
Words become lions
Souls are devoured by rhetoric
Scream
Neo-religion
Of identity sacrifice
All to be me
Rural town sadness
City blues tragic
Scream
Contact dead souls
Ancient nymphs
Casting spells over mad cities
Where wild muses play
Frenzying fun
And belief in new hope
Scream
For the rise of the Phoenix
Fire of rebirth

****

Judy Belfield

ON WAKING

Bright morning sunlight
filters through the crack
where the curtains meet,
a fat ribbon of light
full of dancing dust,
creating a slanted, transparent wall
in front of the plastered one
where shadows hang
like ancient wallpaper.

Brilliant light and vague gh[illegible]
hold hands this day,
this morning,
as sleep wakes from dreams
and cannot tell
yesterday from tomorrow.

A memory slips in
and slides out
like an envelope under the door:
a message from the past
I cannot read--
a privileged moment,
I suspect,
without embroidery or invention,
without joy.

****

Dave O'Brien

MY ROOM OF GRAY DAYS SPENT

Gray from outside, inside spent
Reflect a room in disarray
The forgotten words of one moment
The clock rolls by the time of day

Clothes lay strewn below my feet
Testimonials of amused irritation
Odor of body trapped in sheets
Windows fogged with condensation

Fading walls, visions of green
Ooze like burning flesh, or reptile skin
While shelfless books create a scene
Below dirty light bulbs glowing dim

Here I lie in ttansmutation
Amongst the clutter of gray days spent
A transitory feeling of elation
Frustrations from their roots are rent

Behind me as I close the door
I leave these things to touch no more

****

Yolanda Wolz

SAFETY ZONE

I wonder what people think
of the girl sitting in the corner.
She keeps to herself.
Never intruding on
the people around her.
She doesn't dare step into
their worlds for fear of
rejection
* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
The Plasmo three feet around
my universe made up
of one girl and a billion screams.
I call out for help
but the words just bounce back
off the plasticene walls.
I reach out.
Wait.
It was my cocoon
where I hid waiting for
Janis Ian at 17 and me
to blossom into a beautiful soul,
Now I can't seem to tear
down the walls trapping me.
* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
It's so dark in here,
but I see the light switch.
It's just beyond my reach.
Stepping through the barriers
causes a painful electroshock
meant to keep out those
who would beat me senseless.
I reach out to touch someone
like a telephone commercial
but the operator can't place the call
without a number of someone
outside the safety zone.
If only someone would reach in.

****

Judy Belfield

SOLO CHORUS

Stars covered over
By the mammoth shadow
Of an unnamed thing,
Obliterated moonlight--
No love songs,
No secret fantasies
Or fanciful dancings--
Only the blackness,
Oppressive air,
Warm, humid,
Breathing down the spine,
Slowly.

"Light! Light!"
A desperate voice
Shouts.

A chorus
Louder than the
Mormon Tabernacle Choir,
Returns:
"Pipe down, kiddo,
You aint alone."

****

J. Scott Helm

CAN YOU WRITE TO SOLVE PROBLEMS?

Does putting ink to
Paper end it?
Will problems stop existing
or find somewhere new to hide?
We can only hope.
For too often it just lifts
its head to laugh.
It knows that nobody cares.
Because Johnny can't read
much less understand.
But, I am not Johnny
nor are you.
So we must continue,
to stand with pens in hand
returning the laughter.
It is the only chance we
have for
VICTORY!!!

****

Yolanda Wolz

HIDING

I'm hiding in a closet
where nobody will find me.
I've been here a long time.
Ever since I realized that
I had something to hide.

I was quite young when
I noticed something wrong.
I saw things differently.
Couldn't seem to make myself
Into who I'm supposed to be.

I can't tell you the truth
without losing your respect.
How can I live with me?
I'm certainly not honest
about who I really am.

I think I'll stay here
in the closet where it's safe.
I still need time to think.
I'm scared of what will happen
when I do come out.

****

Dave O'Brien

I ALONE

I alone occupy this space in time
I alone live in my absolute dream
I alone must fight the oppression; which
crawls in the darkness to claw
at my brain; and
I alone will walk to my grave

But the touch of your warm hand
Reassuring words from your smiles
A moment to listen
Moments to glance
A chance--Beyond
I'll sit where I can
Living for living
At least . . .

For awhile

****

Rosemary Grossi

GROWTH

I used to live with great anticipation,
always stretching my neck to see
around the next curve,
straining the harness imposed by time,
anxiously awaiting the newness of
fresh experience, then
quickly crumpling it up,
I'd toss it aside
like a used gum wrapper.
The flavor gone, it got hard to chew.
Spitting it out I'd start anew.

Disillusioned, disappointed,
I rested awhile, finally realizing
it felt good longing for no more than
a beautiful view
a fresh breeze
the tingle of a snowflake on my cheek.

Now I love to savor the flavor of each moment,
lingering lusciously,
carressing each event.
Intent on knowing it fully
as in a lover's union
enjoying intercourse briefly,
then letting go gently

****

Dave O'Brien

RAINDROPS AND GLOOM

Disquieting gloom
Trapped inside a raindrop
The ground is sullen

****

Yolanda Wolz

I'M SCARED

I'm scared and I
feel like running, running away
I must be running
a temperature too.
I feel a fever of one-oh-two.
I see the flames
all around me burning
burning my flesh.
You can't see them on me.
Look at me.
Can you?
Look hard, but see
nothing, nothing of who
I really am.
Sensitive to the extreme
caring, though it doesn't seem
like I really see you.
It's hard to do
looking out through the fire
my eyes burning
burning my soul.

****

Dave O'Brien

COMMEN-tary

Desecrated ant hill, beautiful city, naked, decaying. All colors are children, bleeding, open soulful eyes, tears, death, reaches out to the bureaucratic smiling cigar. Soft life. Working hard for life's simple materialistic ideology. Status symbols. Cadillacs and pay TV. Late night laughing legs. Seeking refuge in another's arms. Seeking truths that are always there, never to be found. Answers! Answers! What were the questions? Young minds, confused, betrayed, Forced to have their own minds with somebody else's thoughts. Creativity wasted for the principles of money. Oh beautiful, schizophrenic people. Laughing, crying, all in the same sentence. Life is soft, living is hard: Stay young, do drugs. Vacuum cleaner Valium blues. Just a touch of vodka to create the mood. Stay sleek, don't grow old. Keep purpose, everybody serves a purpose. Purpose serves everybody. It's a parody folks. Everybody changes the station, and is disgusted by the same picture.

****

Judy Belfield

THE UPPER HAND

On a page in a magazine
my words sit
like the rocks at Stonehenge
keeping their secrets.

John Smith's soul
is exposed on the facing page
his sins and virtues collected
into well-ordered lines
that stack together neatly
like those plastic vegetable bins
everybody wants but nobody buys

I close the magazine.
Smith's soul
smothers my secrets.

****

Dave O'Brien

SERIOUSLY? WITH NO CONCLUSIONS

If you read what I wrote
Could you take it seriously?
Or would you just see,
some shy, stupid kid
hands in pockets
shrugging shoulders?
Do you feel you have something to say
If its' said by somebody else?
Or is nothing to be said?
You can take a new face
From the laser picture disc show
Steel is so cold and impersonnl
The way it reflects your eyes.
Are we ready to challenge a game of death?
How can I judge?
Not sure how I'm judged?

Would you see some shy, stupid kid?
Hands in pockets
shrugging shoulders
Or would you see something else?

If I were to rape your words
It's my own damn business

****

Stacy Biedermann

CLOSE YOUR EYES!

Those baby blues just make me melt,
like a popsicle on a sunny day.
They take me on a journey
into a world of passionate play.
They make me feel so wonderful
and in such a special way.
Please close your eyes,
if you may--
or I'll drown in them
and float away.

****

Nancy Lockhart

TO D. H. LAWRENCE

In some finely executed English garden
I'll not find you,
But rather in the twilight
Fading from the wild violet's eye,
Or there against the night-heart of the
rose
Among the thorns, the scars,
The hidden stars, which only poets know.
It's there I'll go
Guided by a tusk of moon,
Hint of hushed purple,
Haunt of crickets' dirge,
Or that far away piano,
Softly soft
As a mother's kiss . . .

****

Judy Belfield

SOME LITERARY MAGAZINES

Vague lines
that seem to tell something--
obscure phrasings
devoid of lushness
taunting simplicity
looking down their sophisticated noses
at concrete visions.

Pristine portraits
carefully delineated
as though drawn from algebraic
equations
cleaned-up souls
dusted daily for traces of gut
and presented like hospital walls
stark, green, antiseptic . . .

What do I know?
I'm just a hick from Iowa
whose mother was a waitress.

****

Kim Scholl

WHAT DOES SHE THINK?

What does she think
she's doing?
Putting her hand on his.
And now
What does she think she's doing
Kissing his cheek like that?
Who does she think
She is
Staring into his eyes?
Doesn't she know
I still love him?

****

Nancy Lockhart

THE SUN RISES

The sun rises up out of winter
illuminating some ancient giant's tears
run down in rivulets upon the window.
Her breath paints patterns of wisdom
On the wall.

****

Scott Speirs

POEM 1983

Descending amid a steel cloud
Along the grey horizon
With a distant thunder, came
A ship of vast dimensions.

It was the promised coming.
The Lord of all creation
Beckoning me from the future
(The God/Man incarnation).

Seer of past and present, of
Martyrs, saints and sinners
Inquiring if I'd step aboard and
Taste the cosmic visions.

Then I saw--in an instant!
Faces . . .
From the past.

My Uncle Joe
And Aunty Flo
John the Baptist and
St. Francis
Leonardo, H. G. Wells
Wordsworth, Joyce and
Tintoretto
Augustine, the twelve apostles
Mr. King and Aristotle
Honest Abe
The Virgin Mary, and
Talk of Michaelangelo
White on white
Bathed in light.

****

Dave O'Brien

WATCHING

I sat atop the hood
Of a ghost of a Chevrolet,
Stricken with the cancer of rust,
Pen in hand,
Acknowledging the peace.
Unseasonable warmth of a lot of March.
Breathing in a liquid breeze
Hint of a chill, sensation.
A black dog lawn ornament
Reclined, chest heaving in contemplation,
At once a Plato, or Buddha,
Then a rogue
Too lazy to work for his pay.
Insects emerge,
Claiming the air of their new existence,
Two cats lay hypnotized by sunshine.
Azure sky background
Crow-sprouting trees,
Where lonely, dried children
Refuse to leave their mothers branches.
"And where do you fit in?"
Some distant ego inquired.
I refuse to breathe,
melting into the soil.

****

J. Scott Helm

AFFAIRS

I'm overwhelmed with I and me.
It should be you.
Or the best would be
us and we.
Let us do our best.
For we can do it.
It is up to you,
I have done all that is
capable of me.
My mind is under attack.
Why is all this happening to me?
All I want is a simple
emotional life.
No need for highs.
What is wrong with
an even keel?
Isn't the only difference
between fiend and
friend the letter "r"?
So are you my friend?
That is all I ask.
I'm bored.
As tired as can be.
It takes more than I thought.
Doing my best, which is better
than most.
You do inspire,
but for all the wrong reasons.
Is that so bad?
When you are so good.
My emotions are afire.
This is the season
you have made me glad.
My heart is feeling as it should.
Come as you are.
No longer will I admire from afar.
And soon we will have to pass out a
cigar.

****

An ancient lunatic
rains in the trees
at night.
—J.D.M.
Glenney 1983